

INTRODUCTION

This report suggests conservation strategies for the Mohave ground squirrel which could support the issuance of programmatic incidental take permits, “no surprises” assurances and biological opinions to the agencies and jurisdictions which are preparing the West Mojave Plan (Plan). These strategies are based on a review of current agency management which was conducted by the West Mojave Planning Team, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and the California Department of Fish and Game (Department). Biologists evaluated the effectiveness of current management, identified management shortfalls, and suggested measures to address those shortfalls¹. Their findings and recommendations are presented herein.

It must be stressed that these are recommendations developed by Service, Department and Planning Team biologists. They do **not** constitute a formal management proposal by any of the participating agencies (e.g. local government or the Bureau of Land Management).

The suggested strategies are intended to meet two planning needs. They allow state and federal land management agencies to implement their mandate to conserve and protect species of concern and habitats on public lands, a mandate which includes facilitating the recovery of these species. At the same time, the measures suggest a streamlined program to minimize and mitigate the impacts of projects on private lands. Thus the Plan will serve as both a “conservation” plan and a “mitigation” plan.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE EVALUATION REPORT PLAY IN THE WEST MOJAVE PLANNING PROCESS?

The Evaluation Report is not the “West Mojave Plan.” The formulation of the Plan is the responsibility of the Supergroup, including the 28 participating jurisdictions. The evaluation report is one of several resources which are being provided to the Supergroup for its use when it writes the Plan.

The West Mojave Plan is being prepared in four steps: (1) *Foundation* (assembling the best science reasonably available); (2) *Evaluation* (a review of the effectiveness of current agency management and suggestions for improvement); (3) *Supergroup writes the Plan*; and (4) *Environmental Impact Report and Statement (EIR/S)*. Step 1 was completed in 1998. Publication of the Evaluation Report marks the completion of Step 2.

Step 3 involves the writing of the Plan by the Supergroup. The Supergroup will

¹A summary of current management and identified shortfalls is presented for each species. A more detailed description of current management, biological opinions, incidental take permits and other matters concerning FESA and CESA may be found in the *Current Management Situation of Special Status Species in the West Mojave Planning Area (March 1999)*, which the reader is encouraged to consult.

accomplish this task using the suggestions presented by this report, together with the West Mojave scientific data base, map and literature library, the recently published *Current Management Situation of Special Status Species in the West Mojave Planning Area* (March 1999) (CMS), and the expertise brought to the process by the Supergroup.

The preparation of an EIR/S constitutes Step 4. It will identify the environmental impacts of the Supergroup's Plan. A Draft EIR/S and Plan will be released to the general public for a 90-day public review. Following this, a Final EIR/S will be published together with a Plan which incorporates, as appropriate, modifications suggested by the public.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS "CHAPTER THREE" AND THE SEPTEMBER 22, 1999 "EVALUATION REPORT"?

A portion of the Evaluation Report dealing with the desert tortoise, birds, mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians was published on September 22, 1999. That publication included a one-page "Chapter 3," which was titled "Mohave Ground Squirrel" but which contained only the following note:

Findings and recommendations of this chapter are currently being developed by the planning team, the Department and the Service. When completed, this material will be provided to the Supergroup.

Chapter 3 is now complete, and is presented herein. It should be used together with the recommendations for other plants and animals published in September 1999.